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ABSTRACT

In the late 1960's there was the beginning of a movement toward ethnic identity in the United States. Ethnic leaders have typically attributed to the term "ethnicity" certain sociocultural traits. The author of this monograph examines the ethnic movement as both a cultural and socioeconomic phenomenon. Many of the traits attributed to ethnicity are shown to be primarily aspects of class. Historically urban conflicts in America have involved segments of the working class which traditionally comprised large numbers of immigrants. Many conflict situations in contemporary American cities perpetuate the structure of class conflict although the competing parties may carry ethnic labels. This class situation is likely to continue. The ethnic movement is touted by its leaders as shaping a new pluralism, but this author believes that the philosophical underpinnings of the movement are consistent with the ideologies of the "melting pot" and the American dream. It is suggested that combined forces of America's economic and labor situation, educational system, and other factors, have resulted in groups whose ethnicity has been only indirectly instrumental in fixing the social position of their members. Accordingly, he concludes that a new pluralism may not necessarily be ethnically based, and that efforts to genuinely revive ethnic cultural heritages are unlikely to succeed. (Author/GC)

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Whether 'ethnicity' becomes a positive progressive and unifying force for our Nation or a destructive polarizing violent phenomenon depends on us. For in itself, mere 'ethnicity' is neither a positive nor a negative phenomenon.

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PREFACE

Eight years ago, while developing a race relations program, I found myself involved in the field of ethnicity. The 'Ethnic Movement' was gaining momentum with the generous aid of some of the nation's largest foundations. The leadership of the Movement was largely in the hands of those who claimed their leading role in the civil rights marches of the sixties. They used to inform their audiences that the Blacks had told them to go and "work for your own kind". At the time, a newcomer on the scene with ethnic and race relations programs in operation and probably the only one whose definition of ethnicity included Blacks, I was accepted by the established leadership of the 'Ethnic Movement'. I became an instant expert in the field. The Ethnic Movement has been a very emotional experience, perhaps as emotional as the ethnicity itself. The years of experience in action-programs including dealings and association with the Movement, and participation in endless conferences and discussions have humbled me as to my expertise and prepared me to examine the fact of 'ethnicity' beneath its emotional features.

In this monograph I have made an attempt to study ethnicity as a cultural phenomenon and its relationship to 'class'. I have also seen that the battle between the 'ethnic revival' movement and nationality peoples' 'adaptation' to the host culture will continue; each one winning alternately. I am grateful to Sister Mary Michele, Francisco Moya, Irving Levine, Bertha Uetz, Wilhelmina Kelly, Chuck Colgan, Senator Richard Schweiker, Vince Liddle, George French, Ira Harkavy, Congressman Roman Pucinski, Judge Harvey Schmidt, J. Otto Reinemann (deceased), Ezra Staples, Msgr. Philip Dowling, Dorothy Hampton,

Judith Herman (deceased), Msgr. Charles Devlin, Nancy Spitler, Murray Friedman, Peter Binzen, Rev. Vito Carbone, Chuck Stone, Msgr. Geno Baroni, Caroline Golab-Plocha, Bertram Bernard, Dennis Clark, Howard Applegate, and Lary Groth. My association with them has enhanced my practice and refined my theory of ethnicity.

I have drawn very heavily for this study on my two earlier papers: "Multiple Ethnicities: The New Mythology" and "Ethnics in Urban Conflict". They were first prepared in 1973 and 1974 for presentation in professional conferences. In the present undertaking Charles R. Myers assisted in research and weaving the two papers together. Also, I acknowledge Sonia Jaipaul's probing critique, research assistance, editing, and proof-reading. Her Master's thesis, "The Implications of Ethnicity for Poverty and Welfare Policy" clarified my thinking about the functional aspects of ethnicity. Mary Alice Butts' typing and retyping the manuscript without a frown added to my spirits.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Richard Bennett of William Penn Foundation, Sidney Repplier of Philadelphia Foundation, and Dale Phalen formerly of Fels Fund for their sensitivity and generosity in support of my ethnic and race relations work. On St. Patrick's Day last year, Richard Bennett suggested and encouraged that I do some writing and publishing. As a result this is the third publication.

In 1968, my wife Inder introduced me to ethnic and race relations. Since then she has been the best professional support I have had.

Melrose Park, Pa. Jaipaul
Spring 1977

POLITICS OF ETHNICITY

INTRODUCTION

The Ethnic Movement in the United States has been a curious mixture of politics, pride and popular scholarship which has added a new dimension to studies of ethnicity. Attempts by ethnic leaders to demonstrate the centrality of the concept of ethnicity to the Movement have resulted in considerable confusion regarding the nature of the ethnic group in sociological theory. The typically positivist treatments of 'ethnicity' have created the impression that ethnicity has some substantive content, obscuring the relational nature of the social situations which are essential to any empirical realization of ethnicity. Under closer examination, many of the major issues addressed by leading figures in the current ethnicity literature are found to be based on a fundamental positivist error. In light of the theoretical clarifications introduced, the Movement itself is examined.

Ethnic leaders typically attribute to the term

ethnicity socio-cultural traits that are primarily aspects of the working class, not of ethnicity *per se*. In this light, urban interethnic group conflicts often have less to do with ethnic groups than is widely believed. Historically, urban conflicts in America have involved segments of the working class which traditionally comprised large numbers of immigrants. Many conflict situations in contemporary American cities perpetuate the structure of a class conflict, although the competing parties may carry ethnic labels. The potential importance of ethnicity in resolving urban problems depends largely on local factors, however, and on national level 'ethnic' groups. In addition, the structural features of class inhibit and manipulate the role of ethnicity in the genesis of conflict.

Aims of the Ethnic Movement are touted by its leaders as heading toward a New Pluralism, but the philosophical underpinnings of the Movement are found to be consistent with the very ideology which spawned, and which continues to embrace, the basic principles of the Melting Pot and the American Dream. In the name of ethnicity, the reality of class in America has often been ignored, and is even implicitly denied by positions characteristic of some branches of the Movement.

Analysis of the tenets of the Movement suggests that the combined forces of America's economics, labor situations, educational system, and other factors, filtered through various cultural perspectives, have resulted in groups whose ethnicity has been only indirectly instrumental in fixing the social positions of their members. Accordingly, it is concluded that a New Pluralism may not necessarily be an *ethnic* pluralism, and that efforts to genuinely revive ethnic cultural heritages are unlikely to succeed.

I

ETHNIC SCENE: A DISCUSSION

Over a decade ago, America witnessed the beginning of an 'ethnic revival' among White workers, seen by many as roughly analogous to the 'Black Power' movement. One of the key objectives of the Movement has been to shatter the myth of the American Melting Pot, and most of those contributing to the sizeable and growing body of 'ethnic literature' agree that this much, at least, has been accomplished. Volumes have been penned in testimony to this, though it has apparently escaped the general purview of ethnic leaders and commentators that processes which destroy *any* myth inevitably create new ones--perhaps more benign in their sociological import, but no less mythical than the original. I hasten to add that, taken literally, the 'creation of a *new* myth' is a virtual impossibility, and I simply mean a 'new' combination of 'old' elements taken from a vast but culturally limited inventory of symbols and meanings fashioned into a reasonably consistent and intelligible whole. The principle is similar to that of the phonemic level of language, for example, where various combinations of a relatively few bundles of distinctive acoustic features form a vast set of actual and potential words. It should also be clear that in the view expressed here, a myth is not construed as the childish and whimsical flitterings of fantasy, but rather as the complex workings of the mind on itself, as a well known French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated in the mythologies of peoples around the world.

But why this discussion of myth and symbols in an

essay on ethnicity in America? Precisely because the 'Ethnic Movement', like all movements, traffics in the rearticulation of cultural symbols--myth-making by any other name--and it may do us well to examine some of the more salient features of the ethnic movement from this perspective, perhaps enabling us to identify some surprising aspects of the ideological basis of the ethnic credo.

The careful reader of the available literature on ethnicity will notice immediately that there is some confusion as to just what 'ethnicity' and derivative terms mean. Definitions abound, from Weber's classic statement to largely *ad hoc* constructions gleaned from sociology texts or social agency tracts. Factors such as religion, language, place of origin, race, dress, cuisine, custom, personality traits, and so forth are offered collectively or in various combinations as descriptive of what characterizes ethnic peoples. These features may afford a positive definition acceptable to some, but the real substance of the notion in popular writings on the subject is a definition by negation--White ethnics are not WASPs the latter being the positive term, whose referent is presumably clear and understood by all. WASPs, of course, are the Establishment, the oppressors, the villains. The usage is so common, so facile, as to have gained almost unquestioned legitimacy in the current 'ethnicity literature'.

In many respects, 'ethnicity' is this generation of social scientists' leading conundrum, not only regarding the bounding and specification of its meaning, but also, and perhaps especially, in the sense that its 'reality' in contemporary society is alternately affirmed or denied. More than most concepts in social science, ethnicity entertains a heady mixture of logic, emotion and even passion. It has attracted more popular attention

than any conceptual sociological category since the great turmoil over race amongst an earlier generation. The net result has been that social scientists are now presented with an especially challenging problem, since the concept of ethnicity itself remains unsatisfactorily described. The implications of this state of affairs on actual social groups have not yet been identified and explained. This is one of those situations where the problem confronting the theoretical sociologist is disarmingly simple--define ethnicity and show its social usage. The problem is so elementary that it approaches the status of a basic theoretical problem--what is meaning and how is it socially realized? This is the essence of traditionally fundamental questions facing social science, and as such is not easily explicated and understood as the most popular of the recent studies of ethnicity would indicate.

Generally speaking, the current ethnic literature which aspires to theoretical respectability is highly motivated. That is, the arguments and observations presented have as their ultimate purpose the justification of what is at base a political position regarding the legitimate function of ethnic groups in American society. This does not in itself necessarily lessen the sociological worth of studies undertaken for political ends, of course, but the fact remains that most of what has been published in the name of ethnic studies has been poorly conceived and ineptly executed social science. Perhaps more surprisingly, the intended political message is often subverted by a chronic ingenuousness regarding the economic and political facts of life in contemporary urban America.

Not too long ago, this indictment was leveled against the literary leaders of the Ethnic Movement

in the United States by the eminent Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal:

> Ethnic writers have concentrated on an abstract craving for historical identity, but they have not clarified by intensive study what cultural traits are implied, who wants this identity, who should want it, and why, and how it should and could come about. I am afraid, therefore, one must characterize this ethnic movement as upper-class intellectual romanticism.
>
> Like all romanticism, it serves conservative and, in fact, reactionary interests because it is innocent and innocuous. Its adversarial tone attracts some liberals and radicals, but since it does not raise the crucial problems of power and money, it does not really disturb the conservatives. Understandably it can win support from foundations and similar establishments who are eager to be open-minded but, must not get involved in "political" issues. (Mydral, 1974:30)

Being politically naive is not the same thing as being apolitical, however, and it is perhaps the consequences of this fact that make the American Ethnic Movement interesting to the serious social scientist. One notable feature of the Ethnic Movement in this regard is its social and academic autonomy. That is, the ethnic movement has for the most part produced its own commentaries and analyses, though these have not always been identified as the 'position papers' and public rela-

tions pieces which most are.

Msgr. Baroni, a vocal leader in the ethnic movement, provides us with a fine example of the sort of rhetoric ostensibly embodying the philosophy of 'ethnicity'.

> The ethnic factor in America today is a quiet revolution of consciousness aimed at creating a new pluralism. It is sparked by an untenable economic situation and by indignation at having been alternatively ignored and castigated by the establishment. It is a revolution of self-assertion that will utilize new techniques of community participation, community organization, community development, and legislative action to make power felt at the polls.
> (Baroni, 1972:4)

What is the new pluralism to which he refers? Is it to be a revitalization of the Old World heritages of the various immigrant groups wherein Italian-Americans become more Italian, Polish-Americans more Polish, etc., where ethnic groups become more definably ethnic? Or is it, as Colin Greer suggests, "a new drive in political and intellectual conservative circles to encourage our resignation to these old myths [of ethnic diversity and economic mobility] once again--to the old promises and to the old social paralysis?" (Greer, 1974a:4)

This essay critically examines ethnicity in two senses: in a general sociological sense, where the concept 'ethnicity' is viewed as a theoretical construct, and in an empirical social sense, where

'ethnicity' is consciously identified as an organizing principle of a voluntary association under the guise of a primary group. Inasmuch as there are substantial bodies of literature regarding both of these senses of ethnicity--especially in the latter case--a thorough review of the literature is not feasible here. It is useful, however, to look at a few of the major positions with which a reassessment of ethnicity and the ethnic movement must deal. The theoretical aspects of the concept 'ethnicity' is discussed first, before moving on to a view of the ethnic movement in America today, and finally turning to a general assessment of politics and today's ethnicity.

THE CONCEPT OF ETHNICITY

The real utility of any concept in social theory depends in large measure on how clearly its meaning is understood, especially with reference to other social science concepts. On this basis, we would have to say that as an analytically us ful concept, 'ethnicity' presents major difficulties, and more so now than ever before. Anglo-American sociology has traditionally had difficulty with terms and concepts with no tangible empirical referents, such as 'structure', 'thought', and even 'society'. 'Ethnicity' is an interesting illustration of the unrest caused by such concepts since, partly in response to a felt need for concreteness, the companion term 'ethnic' has been made to apply to those individuals who are characterized by their ethnicity, which in turn, is seen as that property or set of properties which are of, like or pertaining to ethnics. This sort of circularity, ludicrous as it may seem when phrased this way, has in the case of the bulk of the recent works on ethnicity been freighted with undue credibility. Ethnicity is typically treated as if it were a thing possessed by some people but not by others, a set of characteristics to greater or lesser de-

grees by all ethnics. This extreme position is perhaps best avoided by addressing the concept 'ethnic group' rather than 'ethnicity'; at least some sort of logical consistency is more likely to follow if we try to envision the features of 'ethnicity' as realized in an actual social group. When, for example, Andrew M. Greeley, one of the frontrunners of the new 'ethnic sociology', calls ethnicity "a sense of presumed common origin" and says that "ethnicity is one of the forms of Gemeinschaft that has survived in a nationalized, bureaucraticized society" (1974:27): he constructs a positivist's image of ethnicity, attributing to it properties it cannot logically have, as is discussed later.

Many of the difficulties with current usages of 'ethnicity' and related terms stem from a misunderstanding of the only major social science theorist to have specifically addressed the subject. The intellectual capital on which Greeley and others survive is embodied in Weber's classic description of the ethnic group:

> Those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent--because of similarities of physical type or of customs or of both, or because of memories of colonization and migration--in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of non-kinship communal relationship, we shall call "ethnic" groups, regardless of whether an objective blood relationship exists or not. The ethnic group differs from the kinship community precisely in being a group (which believes in its common descent) but not a com-

> munity, unlike the kinship group which is characterized by actual communal action. In our present sense, the ethnic community itself is not a community; it only facilitates communal relationships. It facilitates and promotes all types of communal relationships particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificial, that inspires the belief in a common ethnicity. (Weber, 1961:306, emphasis supplied)

Clearly, Weber is saying something more than simply "ethnicity is a sense of presumed common origin". Ethnicity here seems to be an artifice, a politically induced *belief*. It is not the objective conditions of a group that make it ethnic, but rather a 'subjective belief' in its own group identity. In this respect the ethnic group is no different from the cultural group, but this overlooks the point that a cultural group is ethnic only in relation to another cultural group. Schermerhorn, in one of the more intelligent functional treatments of ethnicity to have appeared in recent years, offers what is essentially a simplified version of Weber's definition of the ethnic group:

> An ethnic group is....a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestory, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are:

> kinship patterns, physical contiguity (as in localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.
> (Schermerhorn, 1970:12)

Missing from Schermerhorn's treatment, however, is Weber's insistence that "it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificial, that inspires the belief in a common ethnicity". This is significant, for an ethnicity founded in 'natural' sentiments, or 'primordial attachments' (cf, Greeley, 1974:12 ff.) is something quite different from an ethnicity founded in induced belief. A primordial ethnic has, by virtue of its psychological depth, an ontological status much more substantively content-laden than one which is largely the product of an interaction between mind and the political community, where any content is only circumstantial and provisional. This is something Weber understood and the majority of his latter-day discoverers have overlooked--'ethnicity' designates a social relation; it has no distinct content. It is the failure to recognize the essentially relational property of ethnicity which has kept ethnic studies from progressing much beyond the theoretical level established by Weber, if in any fact there has been any advance at all.

The more active theorists in the current group of students of ethnicity accept this position to the degree that they define ethnicity as 'difference', but few have begun to appreciate the significance of the fact. To acknowledge that ethnicity is cultural difference is no advance in social science

if at the same time 'difference' is reified and given a substance it cannot logically have. Difference is a relation established between two entities or quasi-entities and may involve one dimension (as in the difference between two voltage potentials) or many (as in the difference between a grapefruit and a fish). A specific difference, as the religious difference between Catholics and Protestants, is logically no more concrete than other expressions of difference, such as 'velocity' or 'power'. Difference, then, is neither a thing to be possessed nor an existential state in which 'things' are found. To say that ethnic groups are characterized by difference is misleading if that is taken to mean that a given group is in possession of 'difference', since a pure relation has no substance and cannot be 'possessed' by one of its terms. Yet when a leading figure in the study of the ethnic movement in America commits a major work to answering, among other things, the question "How are ethnic differences transmitted from one generation to another?" (Greeley, 1974:6), he reifies 'difference' in just this way, and in so doing addresses a problem which does not exist. Obviously, the question ought to be "How are ethnic traits transmitted from one generation to another?", but here the mention of ethnicity is gratuitous, since ethnic traits are nothing more or less than cultural traits, and the transmission of cultural traits from generation to generation has received considerable attention from a wide range of scholars. The question, if it is still an interesting one at all, has nothing to do with ethnicity.

Similarily, questions like "Are American ethnic groups really bearers of culture?" and "Is the ethnic factor simply another version of the religious factor?" (Greeley, 1974:5) are sociologically naive--of course American ethnic groups are bearers of culture, just as any other cultural

group bears culture. And, depending on which cultural features are deemed locally significant in marking groups as different from each other, the 'ethnic factor' may or may not be another version of the 'religious factor' as it is becoming, say, in Northern Ireland, but as it is not in Newark. Yet another question asks "Does ethnicity make any difference in human behavior?" This has a ring of legitimacy to it which seems to set it apart from naive queries, but let us consider the implications of the question in more detail. First, we must ask what constitutes the standard of human behavior from which ethnicity may cause some deviation. Does this imply the existence of an American culture, a standard set of rules for a standard set of behaviors, or is there something even more general than that: is there a category properly labeled 'human behavior'? No one, of course, would quarrel with the assertion that there are behaviors which are distinctively human, but within that set there are countless variations, between individuals from one moment to the next. The most significant kind of variation, however, in the sense that it is the most systemic, is the variation between cultural subsets of this cornuopia of 'human behavior'. The consistently significant differences in human behavior, are cultural differences, and at this generic level we may properly call these 'ethnic' differences. Thus to ask if ethnicity makes any difference in human behavior is meaningless--"Does systematic difference make any difference?"

It might be objected that what Greeley intends to ask is whether or not ethnicity is really important--as important as class, for example, in the dynamics of American society--or simply another feature of human existence no more significant than eye color. This is a more interesting reading of the question in two respects: a) it asks, indirectly, how successful the Melting Pot has been,

and; b) it implicitly rejects the notion that ethnicity is simply culturally significant difference (or else the question would not have been asked at all) and suggests a positive content to the term. As we have seen in Weber's definitive remarks on the ethnic group, ethnicity exists as ethnicity in the sense that it facilitates communal relationships in an affectively loaded way. From this perspective, ethnicity makes a difference in human behavior if it does anything, so perhaps this aspect of Greeley's inquiries ought to be rephrased to ask if the relative importance of Gemeinschaft in American society has decreased. This is a difficult question, and an important one deserving more attention than can be given it in this essay, although I shall return to it briefly below. Of more immediate interest is the issue concerning the positive status of ethnicity entailed by Greeley's questions.

If it is insisted that ethnicity is a thing, a positive entity, we are obliged to determine what sort of entity it could possible be. A quick perusal of some of the popular ethnic literature should offer some indication of what is involved in the notion of ethnicity currently in vogue:

> What is an ethnic group? It is a group with historical memory, real or imaginary. One belongs to an ethnic group in part involuntarily, in part by choice. Given a grandparent or two, one chooses to shape one's consciousness by one history rather than another. Ethnic memory is not a set of events remembered, but rather a set of instincts, feelings, intimacies, expectations, patterns of emotion and behavior; a sense of reality; a set of

> stories for individuals--and for the people as a whole--to live out.
> (Novak, 1971:47-48)

> [White ethnics] are developing a new sense of self-awareness. They are reacting to the Black and affluent student revolutions of the 1960's and to the economic stagnation and the social and cultural disruptions that have recently affected their lives. Moreover, they are becoming increasingly positive about their own ancestral cultural traditions, confused toward American culture, and in many ways negative toward Anglo-Protestant dominance. White ethnics are becoming a distinct minority. They have recently been described as alienated, forgotten, troubled, disillusioned, frustrated, and angry. Their shared grievances, coupled with their recent immigrant experiences, have drawn them together, both into their separate nationality groups and into larger category of "white ethnics".
> (Weed, 1973:17)

If ethnicity is the distinctive feature of ethnic Americans--and it seems reasonable to assume that this is the case--then it would appear that ethnicity is bound up with 'self awareness', 'consciousness of self', 'self assertion', etc. Again and again we encounter images of revolutions, awakening, emancipation. Many Americans, according to the most popular commentators, are finding or rediscovering their ethnicity with the same spirit of unbridled enthusiasm which accompanies an adventurer's search for buried treasure. But there is something wrong with this picture of social

process, something missing from, and, as it may turn out, something added to what most theoretically oriented social scientists reckon as the necessary and sufficient ingredients of a human society. Awareness of self, for example, even for the most sanguine of phenomenologists, can never be totally selfless, if by awareness we mean the apprehension in consciousness of a conceptual entity. Irving Levine and Judith Herman, two pioneer champions of the "new ethnicity" suggest some other possibilities, however.

> There may well be a biological urge which others have described as the "territorial imperative". Speculating even further, there may be differences based upon the existence of a collective unconscious. There surely is some evidence that there are differences in the way children learn and few acute observers have failed to notice the differences in expressiveness in various ethnic group. These factors, these distinctions, have much to do with who we are; where we come from; who our parents are; and what setting we find ourselves in.
> ....The recent report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence claims that we suffer from "historical amnesia" regarding these very deep ethnic group differences.
> (Levine and Herman, 1972:180-181)

Territorial imperatives, collective unconscious, expressiveness--terms at least as vague as their possible referents, are, by any standard of analytical rigor, worthless. But even if the dearth of information in these areas regarding aspecific

ethnic groups were miraculously rectified tomorrow, would we then be advised to dispense these data back to the ethnics from whom they were cleverly culled, to assist them in answering the Question--Who am I? Obviously, an identity so formed would be an artifice of limited value to ethnics or to others who may have the interest of ethnics at heart. If ethnics themselves cannot specify what it is about them that is ethnic, and if champions of the 'new ethnicity' are at least as unsure of distinctively ethnic features, a new pluralism will not likely develop in the shape of well-defined Pan-American nationality/culture groups.

If ethnic identity is genuine (and here we ought to insist that an ethnic identity which is contrived or invented is not ethnicity, properly speaking), that is, if it truly is 'natural', 'primordial', then it must, *by definition*, share the existential conditions of the self. An individual's identity is 'ethnic' only when he is socially situated such that the differences between the culture he bears and the larger one in which he lives are symbolically acknowledged and functionally significant. Ethnic awareness, in this sense, can only mean conscious recognition that the 'dominant' culture of the society in which one lives is not one's own culture. *Culture* is important here; ethnic awareness, like culture, is shared by a people, 'my people', 'our people', even 'your people'. To be ethnic then, it is not enough to be able to say 'I do not fit in this culture', for this refers to an interface between an individual and a culture, not between cultures. Multiple Ethnicity broadly describes a situation of cultures in contact, and ethnic identity rests in the participation of an individual in a cultural system identifiably different from the cultures surrounding or coexisting with it. And this need not be a conscious awareness of exactly what it is about one's

cultural heritage that makes him, to a greater or lesser degree, different from his countrymen. 'Culture' is not simply a collection of behaviors, institutions, and customs. It includes these things of course, but it is more than any combination of them. Culture is a set of assumptions about the workings of the universe, and a set of rules which govern individuals, groups, and societies in their thoughts, perceptions, and actions. 'Culture' is not isolable from 'man' -- it is his defining characteristic.

> When seen as a set of symbolic devices for controlling behavior, extrasomatic sources of information, culture provides the link between what men are intrinsically capable of becoming and what they actually, one by one, in fact become. Becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives. And the cultural patterns involved are not general but specific--not just "marriage" but a particular set of notions about what men and women are like, how spouses should treat one another, or who should properly marry whom; not just "religion" but belief in the wheel of karma, the observance of a month of fasting, or the practice of cattle sacrifice.
> (Geertz, 1973:52)

The world not only *looks* different to members of different cultures, it *is* different in the only meaningful sense. It is thus an absolute impossibility for an immigrant from one culture to

another to shed his traditional modes of perception, thought, and action and replace them entirely with new ones. He cannot, by virtue of being fully human, even see the world in precisely the same way as one who has become fully human under the aegis of another culture. Novak's claims not withstanding, it is not quite so simple a matter as embracing one or another culture, particularly for the children of immigrants. This is especially significant in the United States, where with the exceptions of the Native American cultures, all ethnic groups have an immigrant past. This is to be contrasted with other 'ethnic' situations around the world, where ethnic minorities may be the remains of a conquered indigenous civilization, as in the case of the Welsh and Scots in Britain, or longstanding linguistic and regional groups such as Panjabis, Bengalis, Biharis, Tamilians, Rajasthanis, Kashmiris, Maharashtrians, Telegus, etc., in India. These and many other types of plural society are normally all treated under the rubric of 'ethnicity', although the nature of the culturally significant differences between these groups varies widely.

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II

THE ETHNIC MOVEMENT AND THE 'NEW ETHNICITY'

In genuinely pluralistic societies, there are innumerable compromises and accommodations fashioned between groups bearing different religions, languages, occupations, etc. The United States, however, presents a unique social setting for the articulation of cultural difference, where diversity has traditionally been applauded in principle if not in fact. The touch of hyprocrisy in this situation has been noted and explicated countless times by historians, sociologists, prominent figures in the recent ethnic movement, and others, although few have acknowledged that the 'Promise of America' was never 'Come and be yourself', but 'Come and be one of us'. Religious freedom, or at least the idea of religious freedom, was something of a separate issue--other freedoms, such as linguistic freedom or the freedom to preserve or establish formal political systems contrary to the emergent federalism were never seriously entertained, and could not in fact be countenanced by a young America. The immigration to America, then, especially for the first arrivals from each Old World culture, was a major and abrupt transition. Even where fairly large and relatively self-sufficient ethnic communities developed there was always the problem of learning English, and, for the immigrants' children, learning *in* English. The American public education system has been an extremely effective and inexorable means for speeding the acculturation process along. Admittedly, there has been a substantial amount of violence done to the integrity of the cultural systems the immigrants carried with them to this country, but rarely was the violence done because a man was a

member of a particular ethnic group. Rather, immigrants and their families were rejected in many respects because they were conspicuously non-American. The pressures to conform to the "American Way of Life" were tremendous and irresistible. The experience proved devastating to some, who often returned home in despair, but others were encouraged by small successes, and some were able to become quite affluent. The children of immigrants--sometimes immigrants from different countries--born and raised in America, acquired a mixed identity, not quite the same as their parents', not quite 'American'. Most quickly became more competent in the language of the dominant culture than their parents would ever become, and their knowledge of that culture generally was acquired more gradually and in this sense more 'naturally' than was possible for their parents. Thus emerged a new kind of American, standing between two cultural worlds--a position similar to what Victor Turner has called 'liminality'. These children of immigrants learned early on that success in America was only realistically possible through 'American' means. Most were able to advance beyond their parents' level of material success and, typically, most believed it possible for their own children to go even further. In their pursuit of that goal, most second generation ethnics made a conscious effort to keep their children from being exposed to too much of their own cultural heritage, trying instead to raise them 'American'. One of the more visible results of this sort of motivated socialization of third generation ethnics is their charateristic ignorance of the language and traditions of their grandparents, and even a decided dislike of things associated with the immigrant past.

Ethnicity in the United States thus is unique not only because it was almost entirely imported and tremendously varied, but also because it has been

an ethnicity seeking, for the most part, to eliminate itself. In this, it has been successful to a remarkable degree, for most third and fourth generation 'ethnics' have, with the exception of their names, few reminders of the minority status of their forbears. Much of this has been due to intermarriage and residential mobility, but probably the major factor in the relatively rapid synthesis of Old and New World cultures was the functional necessity to adopt at least those cultural rules, or variants of these rules, which would enable a largely peasant population to deal with the roles, expectations and demands of a rapidly industrializing economy. Some of the social institutions of the Old World simply could not be maintained in the industrial centers of the United States, when many of the immigrants had their first encounter with wage labor and with the often horrendous conditions under which the work had to be done. And it must be remembered that no Old World communities immigrated *en masse*--most of one's fellow immigrants were in any other context perfect strangers. Adjustment to America was not difficult simply because there was resistance to one's own culture, but also because, even with no resistance, it was not feasible for a loosely organized group of countrymen to replicate their native culture under these novel conditions. It is naive romanticism to believe that, left to their own resources, ethnic Americans would have maintained the material and symbolic artifacts of their native cultures. And it is equally fanciful to suppose that third and fourth generation ethnics of today are culturally 'lost' as a result of the immigration experiences of their ancestors.

These features of ethnicity in America, along with some other factors, can help in understanding the nature of the Ethnic Movement (or the Ethnic Revival) which has attracted so much attention over the past few years. We have already seen that the

Ethnic Movement has been variously described by its most vocal spokesmen as a revolution of consciousness, a rediscovery of individual and collective identity. One of the most interesting things about this 'movement', if indeed it is one, is the speed with which it developed. How did it happen that ethnics suddenly felt the need to vigorously assert their claims to a cultural heritage which precious few of them have ever known first-hand? Michael Novak, one of the ethnic movement's most prolific self-appointed spokesmen, describes the sorts of feelings and uncertainties which led him to rediscover his ethnic idenity.

> My parents, so far as I know were the first Slovaks in our town to move outside the neighborhoods traditional for our kind of people and move into "American" suburbs. There were not, I recall, very many Catholics in the rather large, and good, public school I attended from grades two until six. I remember Mrs. S., the fifth-grade teacher, spelling "Pope Pius" with an "o" in the middle, and myself with gently firm righteousness (even then) correcting her.
>
> What has happened to my people since they came to this land nearly a century ago? Where are they now, that long-awaited fully Americanized third generation? Are we living the dream our grandparents dreamed when on creaking decks they stood silent, afraid, hopeful at the sight of the Statue of Liberty? Will we ever find that secret relief, that door, that hidden entrance? Did our grandparents choose for us, and our posterity, what they should have chosen?
>
> Now the dice lie cold in our own uncer-

tain hands.
(Novak, 1971:XXII)

> The new ethnicity does *not* entail: (a) speaking a foreign language; (b) living in a subculture; (c) living in a "tight-knit" ethnic neighborhood; (d) belonging to fraternal organizations; (e) responding to "ethnic" appeals; (f) exalting one's own nationality or culture, narrowly construed. Neither does it entail a university education or the reading of writers on the new ethnicity. Rather, the new ethnicity entails: first, a growing sense of discomfort with the sense of identity one is supposed to have--universalist, "melted", "like everyone else"; then a growing appreciation for the potential wisdom of one's own gut reactions (especially on moral matters) and their historical roots; a growing self- confidence and social power; a sense of being discriminated against, condescended to, or carelessly misapprehended; a growing disaffection regarding those to whom one had always been taught to defer; and a sense of injustice regarding the response of liberal spokesmen to conflicts between various ethnic groups, especially between "legitimate" minorities and "illegitimate" ones. There is, in a word, an inner conflict between one's felt personal power and one's ascribed public power: a sense of outraged truth, justice, and equity.
> (Novak, 1974:19)

Behind this rich and fruity prose, we must assume,

there is something bearing directly on ethnicity in the conventional sense. It is not, however, ethnicity as discussed by Weber, since several of the characteristics Weber associated with the concept are not specifically mentioned, especially the sense of community facilitated by group identity. Communal relations, in fact, are not necessarily even implied in Novak's expositions, which are much more concerned with a personal awareness of thematic differences between oneself and the WASP elite or at least Novak's image of the WASP elite. Novak and other 'new ethnics' share this concern, which under closer examination leads us directly to the heart of the 'new ethnicity'.[1] Let us consider the circumstances surrounding the awakening of Novak's ethnic consciousness. He is filled with resentment that the world asks him to be someone he, by nature, is not. He has been condescended to and discriminated against by those to whom he has been taught to defer--his "social betters". But in what social context were these indignities suffered? Not in the "old neighborhood"--his youth was spent, in his words, in an "American suburb", where he was able to develop sufficient fiber to correct his teacher for incorrectly identifying the Pope as Pious. Interestingly enough, Novak has mentioned several times in print an incident which seems to place his own ethnic awareness--or at least what would normally be taken as

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[1] Properly speaking, of course, ethnicity both as a concept in social science and as any reality to which it corresponds, is invariant. There can be no 'new' or 'old' varieties of ethnicity. That the leaders of the current Ethnic Movement have found it necessary to coin a new term for their interests and concerns might justifiably serve as a hint that, taken together, many factors of the 'new ethnicity' are not ethnicity at all.

ethnic awareness in the Movement--in the relatively recent past. "When Time magazine referred to me in 1972 as a 'Slovak-American', I felt an inner shock; I had never referred to myself or been publicly referred to in that way. I wasn't certain how I felt about it" (Novak, 1974:18-19). It will be remembered that 1972 was the year after Novak published his very popular book, The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics, making it somewhat difficult to fully accept that Novak's ethnic label was the unsolicited gift of the journalistic establishment. Be that as it may, Novak's enumeration of things the new ethnicity is not, together with his vaguely defiant list of features that are part of the new ethnicity, do not describe the daily joys and frustrations of life in an "ethnic neighborhood", where the WASP presence is, for the most part, institutional rather than personal. Under the conditions normally associated with ethnic neighborhoods the highly personal resentment and outrage described by Novak is not likely to occur except when individual members of the community move into another social stratum. The WASP Establishment, such as it is, does not spend much time bothering about ethnic differences in its daily operations. What bothers the 'upper crust' is the infiltration of class inferiors into positions of prominence. The many and varied modes and means of offering resistance are summoned against any ethnic--or WASP, for that matter--whose upward mobility threatens or annoys the established upper middle class. Clearly, it is much more likely that whatever hardships Novak, Greeley, Baroni and others--whose positions of leadership in the Ethnic Movement crown careers beginning in the working class, or in what is believed to be a working-class life-style--have experienced in their mobility into affluence and professional respectability have been primarily the result of an increasingly activated class-conflict which for most ethnics and working-class WASPs lies dormant and unrecognized. Upward mobility, in other words, is

much more likely to introduce ethnics to prejudices and displays of contempt and misunderstanding than is ethnicity *per se*. The ethnicity which is the concern of the 'new ethnics' involves a vaguely defined congeries of factors and properties, the most important of which may well turn out to be class. Class, however, has never been the formal basis of the Ethnic Movement, which has, as discussed later, built itself on a rather elaborate fiction.

One of the organizational tactics employed by leaders of the current Ethnic Movement is to appeal to problems of ethnics generally, without special attention to individual cultural heritages in an attempt to engender a sense of camaraderie amongst all ethnics. One way of going about this is to formally oppose 'White ethnics', as a collectivity, to Blacks on the one hand, and to White 'non-ethnics' (WASPs) on the other. Msgr. Baroni is a notable exponent of this approach. He is disturbed, for example, that White ethnics have been the scapegoats for America's racist guilt. He protests: "But racism is not our invention; we did not bring it with us; we found it here" (1971:11). Michael Novak echoes these words: "Racists? Our ancestors owned no slaves. Most of us ceased being serfs only in the last two hundred years". (1971:60) Baroni goes on to note with obvious pleasure that,

> The Harris Survey, conducted for the National Urban League, reported that "native" Americans--White Anglo-Saxon Protestants--rather than the so-called "White ethnics" are more likely to:
> - think Blacks are pushing too fast for racial equality;
> - disapprove of the Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation decision; and
> - favor separate schools for Blacks and

Whites. (Baroni, 1972:9-10)

He concludes that "the study suggests that some older Americans may be projecting and handing down their own prejudices to ethnic minorities of recent foreign origin" (1972:10). This last point is, or has been, undoubtedly true- -people coming from lands where there are few if any Blacks will probably not have strong feelings about them, one way or other. But this is not to say that the capacity, and even the tendency, to construct operational social categories based on difference did not exist in the fatherland. No culture in the world is so committed to egalitarianism that it does not discriminate between peoples. Where societies are racially homogeneous there will be other criteria for group membership, and differences in power, prestige, and a host of other factors. American racism has surely distinguished itself in its severity and in its success at winning new adherents, but the fundamental processes of American racism are no different in kind from those which operate in cultural systems everywhere. The ethnics Baroni and Novak claim to represent cannot be blamed for the institution of slavery, although the ethnic Americans started out less innocent of prejudices than some would like to believe. Is the 'new pluralism' then to be built on the elaboration of such differences between groups as already exist?

A cornerstone of the New Ethnicity is the myth of the WASPs. On the one hand, the WASPs are "the economic and power aristocrats [who] are ignorant and hostile to our basic social needs" (Baroni, 1972:11), yet who according to the Harris survey, are the most vocal opponents of their own legislation. Obviously, there is a bit of dissension in the WASP nest if there is in that fabled place no agreement on what is desirable and what is not. It is no secret, in fact, that many WASPs suffer

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badly at the kindred hands of the Establishment. WASPs in Appalachia have hardly fared terribly well, to take an extreme example, but they do not see their plight in terms of being the unloved child in the great WASP family. Nor do most middle class WASPs feel any affinity with the "robber barons [who] legally steal [ethnics'] life savings by trading low savings interest for high loan interest" (Baroni, 1972:11); WASPs lose their money that way too. Perhaps part of being a WASP is not being aware of it; perhaps WASPdom is itself too varied a thing to be deserving a name of the same order as 'Italian-American'; perhaps WASPdom is a fiction, a myth. The new stereotype of the WASP, then, joins the host of other ethnic caricatures as mythical creations of the same order as those which the ethnic movement presumably intends to quash. Yet, stereotypes, like clichès no matter how out rageous or tiresome, are never completely without foundation. If they are of limited use in describing the targeted group, they can at least tell us something about those who believe and use them.

> In the country clubs, as city executives, established families, industrialists, owners, lawyers, masters of etiquette, college presidents, dominators of the military, fundraisers, members of blue ribbon communities, realtors brokers, deans, sheriffs--it is the cumulative power and distinctive styles of WASPS that the rest of us have had to learn in order to survive. WASPS have never had to celebrate Columbus Day or march down Fifth Avenue wearing green. Every day has been their day in America.
> (Novak, 1971:115)

This fragment of Novak's lengthy caricature of WASPs identifies two main features of WASPdom: wealth and power. That this wealth and power is

wielded by the effete and dilettantish is almost irrelevant; that "WASPs have never had to celebrate Columbus Day or march down Fifth Avenue wearing green" more poignant than to the point. The financial and political positions of the WASPs are essential to his caricature simply because they are positions to which ethnics have had limited access. The real issue of WASP vs. ethnic is not cultural heritage, but *class*, and it is testimony to the Americanization of ethnics that they, along with the rest of us, overlook this concept, and avoid the term. In even so engagingly written a work as Novak's The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics (1972) there runs a theme of surprisingly naive sociologizing. Throughout his unquestionably entertaining book the institutional life of WASPs --and of all other ethnic groups, for that matter --is treated from a perspective of a psychologism which imputes to institutions the properties of individuals--personalities, moods motivations, etc. It is as though capitalism, Protestantism, industry, and even the English language have engaged in a malicious conspiracy to deny the ethnics their fundamental human rights *as* individuals. WASPdom is thus caricatured as inhibited and inhibiting, overly moralistic and amoral, pompous, elitist and dull. Ethnics, on the other hand, are exuberant, romantic, passionate, personally ethnical, and troubled with the business of becoming American without sacrificing their identities *as* ethnics.

Andrew Greeley predicts that future historians will see that "ethnic differences, even in the second half of the 20th century, proved far more important than differences in philosophy or economic system" (1969:5). We should ask, however, what ethnic differences are, if economics or philosophy do not figure prominantly in them. According to Greeley, the nature of American ethnicity is found in the European history of immigrant groups

to the U.S.

> The ancestors of the immigrants to the United States were, for the most part, peasants living in the agricultural communities of European postfeudal society. .... The peasant villages of Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland or the Balkans were not the most comfortable places in the world.
>
> .... Nevertheless, there was a warmth and intimacy and closeness in these peasant communities. A person could be sure of the pattern of relationships and be sure that while he might have enemies, he also had friends, and the friends and enemies were defined by historic tradition. ....
>
> Some time after 1800, European peasant society began to break up, partly because, as the population increased, there were more people than jobs in the agricultural communes, and partly because the emergent industrialization in the cities desperately needed new labor. ....
>
> The pilgrimage from peasant village to city, and later to the cities of America, brought to many the wealth of the affluent society.
>
> But something was also lost: the warmth and intimacy, the social support of the commune was gone.
> (Greeley, 1969:15-16)

Thus a peasant background is a common feature on the majority of immigrants to the United States,

and accounts for some of the difficulties in adjustment to American cities. Yet this sheds little light on ethnic *differences* except in the limited sense that 'ethnics', collectively, are different from 'older' Americans, even in Greeley's view, *precisely* by virtue of a philosophical and economic orientation to peasant society. The assertion that the distinctive feature of ethnics generally is this peasant heritage, places a peasant heritage in a position which transcends inter-ethnic differences in language, religion, etc. That this is not the case is seen readily enough in the inter-ethnic conflicts of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and is paralleled to a degree in America where, peasant heritage notwithstanding, immigrant groups and their descendents have done combat with each other ideologically and physically. Writers on ethnicity often explained these conflicts as the inevitable result of the heartless domination of the ethnics by the WASPs, whose consummate power, coupled with an unparalleled deviousness has encouraged ethnics to battle each other in a hopeless race to become Americans, WASP-style.

While it is surely true that many of the historically WASP-dominated institutions of America (colleges, banks, the military, etc.) remain largely in WASP hands, it is not primarily the WASPs, but the institutions themselves, and our universal acceptance of them, that allows the myth of the American WASP to persist, and the new myths of the American ethnics to be generated.

In a country settled largely by English and Teutonic people, the early institutions resembled their counterparts in England, Germany, the Netherlands, etc. These institutions became seats of power and wealth, and persons in key positions quite naturally became wealthy and powerful. A

class situation developed (or more accurately, a modified replica of a European class hierarchy emerged) in a predominantly WASP society. An influx of foreigners, possessing little wealth and initially no political power--certainly no authority--presented an immediate and direct threat to the lower working class, *not* to the established upper class, the bastion of WASP finance, letters, and industry.

The nineteenth century notion of progress permeated all aspects of life both in Europe and America. In America, those who aspired to success subscribed to a set of predicates that formed the basis of the American class system: the distribution of wealth based on merit and effort, the near divinity of law, the spirit of individualism and competition, etc. In days before television and the public display of officials and corporate magnates, immigrants could not possibly copy the life style of the elite, since few, if any, could have known it, even remotely. The factories and slum tenements which welcomed the immigrants simply bore no resemblance to the life of the upper class. To those wishing to live in America, they offered a limited set of survival techniques consistent with, and a expressive of, the basis of America's informal classism. It was not so much that in order to succeed in America one had to be WASP-like--often upper class WASPs had attained success through different (and often quite un-WASP-like) means than those available to the factory worker--as it was a situation wherein the immigrant had to distinguish himself as an economic and political entity separate from his fellow workers *before* he could become WASP-like.

The immigrant, and even the lower class WASP, were made to believe that success would be facilitated by patterning their behavior and thoughts along

the line of the supposed upper class WASP template, although this in no way implied actually becoming a WASP. Poor White Anglo-Saxon Protestants were, after all, technically WASPs, but they were unable to become the WASP of the myth in any but a token sense--their poverty was daily testimony to that. Real WASPs by virtue of their natural edge in the social Darwinian battle for survival, succeeded almost as a matter of course. One was not fully WASP until one had arrived. This was not an entirely unreasonable belief: the American landed and monied class, even though relatively informal by European standards, had been established quite quickly, and originally in a homogenous society. In large measure, the successful in America had their roots in the middle and upper classes in England, and the Spencerian notions of evolutionary process seemed confirmed in America just as they were abroad. We normally think of the social Darwinism of England at the time as being a justification for colonial activities--a kind of racial protocol with English-speaking Whites at the evolutionary zenith. This was in fact certainly a major feature of English thought, but the more significant effect of social Darwinism for America was the legitimation of the class system in England. The system in America was a close, although inexact, duplicate of this, the major differences being the greater tendency in America to accept acquired wealth as an indication that one was at least moving in the right direction, and the relatively greater amount of wealth deemed proper for an upwardly mobile aspirant to acquire. The early Americans truly believed that if an individual deserved to succeed, he would, and his success would verify that he *knew* America, was dedicated to it, and had reaped his just rewards. The immigrants were notoriously unsuccessful at success, obviously because they were unworthy of it *not* for being ethnics, but because they, like the poor WASPs, were inadequately equipped to meet the American meritocracy on its own terms. So if ethnics in

America are disparaged because of their dress, foods, and customs, it is not simply these things that make them ethnic; part of being an 'ethnic American' rests in being of the working class. Perhaps even the converse is true: to be working class is to be ethnic, for, even without having labels for them as for 'Italian-Americans, Polish-Americans', etc., the affluent American--the 'real' WASP if you will--feels no bond, no special responsibility to his poor consanquines. Even such ethnic luminaries as Geno Baroni and Csanad Toth have, perhaps unconsciously, made this classificatory error. Much offense is taken at the television series All in the Family for its role in a WASP conspiracy to "blame working class ethnics for all the social and racial problems of our cities" (Baroni, 1972:9) wherein "the middle American ethnic is portrayed as a cryptofacist" (Toth, 1972:20). Ironically, Archie Bunker, the series hero, is *not* an ethnic at all, but a solid, working-class WASP.

On the other hand, economic success does not insure the full membership in the upper class, as the *nouveau riche* do not often move comfortably in the circles of the old rich. This is where the confrontation of WASP life-ways with all others most conspicuously reveals the anti-ethnic prejudice that ethnic spokesmen find characteristic of American society generally. As a result, some members of the ethnic movement have espoused a political strategy very close to that of civil rights activists of the fifties: things will be better if we can just get the WASP to *like* us. Folk fairs, ethnic foods fests, and other 'social' affairs have been organized, advertised, and implemented with the express purpose of entertaining and thereby changing the attitude of the general (WASP) public. These affairs may have amused their audiences and participants, but they have not dealt with the *real* issues of ethnicity--power and poli-

tics--their effects not substantially different from that of minstrel shows. True, they emphasize ethnic differences, but rather than depicting contemporary American ethnic life, they harken back to the colorful tradition of the fatherland in a fashion which embraces, rather than challenges, the WASP way of doing things.

There are a great many ethnics who have learned the futility of the soft sell, much as Blacks did in the last decade. Many realize that the "change in the hearts of men", which mid-fifties liberalism dictated as requisite to any real progress by minority groups, is not going to happen as a matter of course, and in any case, it isn't going to happen soon. Accordingly, some have encouraged their ethnic fellows to rally round the workers' cause, and address the issue of classism in America. But to date the approach had been less than spectacularly successful, primarily because the appeal to identity as workers, really an appeal to class consciousness, is premature--it is in itself somehow 'un-American'. And the summons to 'ethnic groups' have not reached a ready audience. What *ethnic* group? What, for example, is the social referent of the 'Italian-American?' Perhaps not even Italian-Americans know for sure. Those attempting to organize people along ethnic lines must face and overcome these difficulties: the intended constituency doesn't always cooperate, doesn't, in fact, even know that it *is* the intended constituency. We return again to the question: "What does it mean to be ethnic?"

In essence, ethnicity is a phenomenon of cultures in contact. In a culturally homogeneous society, there are no ethnic groups. If some members of that society move into another, then in their new setting they may constitute an ethnic group by virtue of their cultural differences from the larger

society. To be ethnic, then, is simply to 'be' where the prevailing culture is not entirely one's own. One might ask how long such a situation might last, and under what conditions the appelation 'ethnic" loses its applicability. Blacks, for example, have been in America for about three hundred years. Culturally, they are far more 'American' than 'African' (the term itself is a gross oversimplification of a vast array of cultures). They have been through the American educational system, they watch American TV, eat American foods, fight in American wars, etc. But somehow, America does not regard Blacks as fully American. In the public mind, they still constitute a special group, different from the norm. In other words, they are an ethnic group. Of course, some may argue that Blacks constitute a *racial* group. Yet the definition of race and certainly its role in human affairs are culturally conditioned. Physical characteristics are simply markers for real or imagined psychological and social differences--they are a shorthand for differences in culture, and the legitimacy of posited causal relationships between physical and cultural traits is beside the point. People conceived as sharing certain cultural characteristics, either by themselves or by others, constitute an ethnic group. This does not deny that Blacks constitute a special case, for they most certainly do. The violence done by slavery to the many cultural traditions represented among those forcibly brought to America cannot be overestimated. The seditious disruption of the family--the primary mechanism for the transmission of culture--succeeded in producing among slaves cultural chaos of unprecedented magnitude. With the traditional cultures largely shattered, these new Americans could behave only according to rules almost entirely defined and delimited by the old Americans. In this sense, the heritage of most Blacks in the United States today is a thoroughly American one. But the product of 'American culture' is not the same thing as that

culture itself. Its very closeness to the workings of the American system makes Black culture seem that much more alien. Its existence is living testimony to an America few Americans want to know about.

White ethnics are another matter. True, as immigrants they differ visibly from the 'American norm', but the passage of a few generations blurs distinguishing features so that one can no longer easily identify *bona fide* members of a particular ethnic group. But doesn't this take us back to the old Melting Pot myth? Not exactly. The Melting Pot was supposed to take people from all over the world, simmer them a bit, and produce the New Americans: bearers of a common culture, equal participants in the wonderful experiment of the New World. By now, most people acknowledge the naivete of the Melting Pot explanation, but to deny a process of Americanization would be equally naive. Immigrants to this country have adopted a new language, political system, educational structure, and host of other aspects of daily life which largely precluded the preservation of Old World traditions in their complete and natural forms. This has not occurred, of course, among any group so extensively as it has with the Blacks (excepting the American Indians, but that is a different sort of catastrophe), but it has kept ethnics from being *too* ethnic. At the same time, however, America has clung to ethnic labels, not so much to preserve a cultural pluralism as to ensure the integrity of a quasi-mythical 'American' culture, defined in opposition to 'alien' cultural elements. Culture contact in America has traditionally not been viewed as a meeting of American culture with Italian, Irish, or some other specific culture:

> ....where immigrants, or the sons of immigrants, do not heartily and in good faith throw in their lot with us, but

> cling to the speech, the customs, the ways of life, and the habits of thought of the Old World which they have left, they thereby do harm to both themselves and us. (Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Schrag, 1970:20)

Theodore Roosevelt's presidential words bespeak an indiscriminate classification of a multitude of cultures as simply "Old World".

The tendency to define all cultures in relation to one's own is not unique to Americans, of course, but surprisingly, the classificatory generalizations have been heartily endorsed by ethnics themselves. The ethnic movement, while it may produce the rhetoric of cultural pluralism, by its very name betrays its actual organizing principles. The message of unity is couched, not in terms of groups of Italians, Irish, Poles, etc., forming an ethnic coalition, but in terms of individuals that identify with and are committed to *a* group whose sense of community arises from the abstract notion of 'ethnicity'. When Baroni and his colleagues issue such a directive as "We summon ethnic people across the country to rise up...." (1972:11), he addresses the granddaddy of all ethnic groups--the "ethnic Americans"--and in so doing preserves the essence of traditional American social classification. Implicitly, of course, if ethnic Americans are to rise up as one, then the differences between ethnic groups must be less than the differences between ethnics generally and the rest of American society. Irish Americans, in such a scheme would feel more affinity with their Italian American ethnic brothers than with 'modal Americans'. That happy situation is an unlikely one, as we know, in many American cities. As in appeals to unity based on a recognition of class differences, Baroni's summons to 'all ethnic people' cannot realistically effect the desired response on

its own term. It is not sufficient affirmation of one's identity with a particular cultural heritage to call him simply 'ethnic'. But how much more sacrifice can we be 'Being ethnic' which in fact means simply *'being'* in a society whose dominant culture is not one's own, *not* 'being Italian' or whatever?

Members of the same ethnic group may share with each other similar ideas of who or what 'modal America' is, and agree that they deviate from it in similar ways, but rarely could they specify what it is about them that is Italian, Irish, etc. For most members of ethnic groups in America being 'Italian', 'Irish', etc., connotes a vague awareness that one's life is not entirely synchronized with 'modal America'. This is not to say that one views himself as not-quite-American. The process of acculturation undergone by immigrants provides, by the second and third generation, a 'cultural grammar' which its bearers know as 'American'. When Levine and Herman note that "one of the dilemmas for 'new ethnics' is the complicated relationship between ethnic identity and identity as 'human beings', the more universalist segment" (1972:177) they trouble themselves with a false dichotomy. 'Ethnic', as I have tried to stress here, denotes a condition in which individuals' socialization occurs in a cultural context somewhat different from the predominant one. One's identity as a human being *is* his ethnic identity: immediately, if he is born into an ethnic group; potentially, should he leave a society where his culture dominates for one where it does not.

An individual's political attitudes, religious beliefs, occupation, and so on may be ultimately traced to his membership in a particular group, and studies attempting to do just that abound, often revealing, 'statistically significant'

differences on such dimensions between ethnic groups. To many in the ethnic movement, politics, national morals, and labor relations are the issues which define ethnics apart from 'society-at-large', and to the degree that many--perhaps even the majority-- of ethnic Americans are directly involved in confrontations over particular points in these spheres the movement genuinely serves ethnics. But this is not to say that the ethnic movement is making the most of ethnicity *per se*. Social workers and politicians are concerned with 'ethnicity' far more than are ethnics themselves. 'Ethnic' is not a major operational category in the minds of most people to whom the term is applied. To solicit the support of people for a political endeavor based on a general appeal to 'ethnicity' is really to ask people to identify their ethnicity, and themselves, with issues which are only the surface manifestations of an infinitely complex cultural 'grammar'. The whole of everyday life involving one's relationships to local institutions such as the Church, the corner store, the playground, the hospital, the school, etc., is lived in a style which participants recognize as their own. But throughout America, neighborhood autonomy is becoming progressively more and more a practical impossibility. As local institutions collapse, threats to traditional lifestyles, 'ethnics' or otherwise, come increasingly to the level of conscious awareness. An individual's identity is challenged when his place in society is disrupted. Accordingly, the cause of ethnicity is served when humans needs are met, and human needs are best met with some sensitivity to the particulars of the human involved. Therein, lies the greatest potential contributions of a 'new ethnicity': to strengthen the sense of community locally, and to sensitize others to the foundations of the community.

Interest rates, municipal services, quality of ed-

ucation, working conditions, and a multitude of other issues require attention, certainly. But in attending to these problems we need not champion the cause of those who would argue that *ethnicity* has been responsible for the plight of ethnic workers and that a 'new ethnicity' is the way out. By making ethnic differences acceptable (and that is what a lot of the Ethnic Movement is about), the tenets of the American Dream are reinforced--once ethnicity is not a handicap, then ethnics who deserve success will get it, *as* ethnics. We may think we have destroyed the myth of the Melting Pot, but we have in fact strengthened the assumptions on which it was based in the first place. A successful New Pluralism, should it come at all, will almost certainly not see a florescence of ethnic clubs and organizations with a corresponding increase in the consumption of pasta, pierogies and soda bread. The New Pluralism will see the immediate issues of jobs, housing, education, etc., and ultimately, of issues fundamental to American society generally, argued and contested by Americans of all sorts and in different styles, some of which will be identifiably 'ethnic', some of which will not.

III

ETHNICITY AND CLASS

Past generations felt the hardships of acculturation in rapidly developing industrial nation; their modern descendents do not live in the same symbolic universe, and *cannot*, therefore, be identified by their ethnicity in the same way as the immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For one thing, modern Blacks occupy a social position which did not exist prior to 1960--a peculiar marriage of a segment of the political establishment with a hitherto disenfranchised bloc of the lower class. No right-thinking politician seeking public office would dare to display openly any anti-Black sentiments, for while most Blacks may still occupy the lower economic positions in America, the cause of Blacks, or more precisely the *idea* of justice for this long-oppressed group, has found an extremely visible and vocal group of sympathizers in the White upper middle class. So while Blacks might still be poor, they have gained a respectable amount of political clout in the past fifteen years.

The occupational rivalries that characterized the periods of greatest immigration to the United States were not of this Black/White sort. Rather, the most recent immigrants had to compete for jobs with the poor WASPs and groups which had arrived earlier. The greatest difficulty for new arrivals to urban America was not the legitimation of minority cultural heritage, but the exit upward from the lowest ranks of the working class. At least until the early 20th century, all immigrant groups in America entered an economy desperately in need

of huge quantities of cheap industrial labor to support and enrich a controlling class which for the most part was already firmly established. While there may be a good bit of truth in the picture of America as the land of opportunity, the range of opportunities has not been encumbered by a class structure, as the American Dream would have it, and the initial steps of upward mobility have proven often enough to be the most difficult. American cities, hot spots in the great Melting Pot, have supported environments of ruthless competition for the genuinely limited resources actually available to the working class, whatever the ethnic background of that class happened to be.

The Italianness or Polishness of an immigrant group had no real impact on the facts of American economy even during the periods of greatest migration. We have argued above that anti-ethnic prejudice has been less a matter of animosity toward other cultures than a response to a perceived threat to relatively well established groups from the warm working bodies of the invaders. Writers such as Michael Novak, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan have followed the American sociologists' tradition of portraying an America where the immigrant is met by an onslaught of WASP demands to melt into non-ethnics, a situation likely to generate the supremely painful 'identity crisis' for the immigrant and his descendents. It is not the things ethnics have wanted and could not get that they see as the real issue, but that ethnics could not advance in American society as easily as they might have precisely because they were *ethnic*. It is almost as though the WASPs, so defensive of their property and generally flaccid way of life, have conspired to deny full humanity to any but themselves, or perhaps to ethnics remade in their image. The solution, it seems, is to somehow impress on the American mind that cultural pluralism is a 'wonderful thing', that 'difference is beauti-

ful', and then, once the WASPs learn to accept ethnic Americans as simply Americans, the major battle in the ethnic struggle will have been won. This would follow the logic of the current Ethnic Movement, and certainly represents much thinking on the subject in professional circles. It is, however, difficult to imagine a more naive perspective on American society; a perspective all the more remarkable for its consonance with the caricature of WASP thinking. The ethnic revival, regardless of the claims made for it by its leaders, is largely based on an appeal to the American Dream. Once it becomes acceptable to be ethnic, ethnics will be able to move freely in American society, just as WASPs do. The fundamental point that ethnicity in America is a matter of class is often missed. As we know, ethnics are ethnics in the popular sense only so long as they remain in the working class. An ethnic who works his way into the upper middle class normally loses his ethnic label *not* because he is no longer Italian, for example, but because he has moved out of the working class, and has ceased being Italian only according to *working class* Italian standards. It is interesting to note that the rhetoric of the Ethnic Movement's most prominent leaders does not provide for an upper class ethnic; when the rich want to 'act out' their ethnicity, they visit the old neighborhood and eat some garlic. Or the serious professional ethnic takes courses in his ancestral language, learns the history of the European fatherland, and travels to the continent to see where it all began. The ethnic neighborhood persists and holds some spiritually remunerative tie on all who grow up there, because it embodies the ethnic soul, offering a place for true communion with the ethnic things in life. People stay in the neighborhood because they like being with other Italians or Poles, and they hate the coldness of suburbia (which most could not afford anyway). The integrity of the ethnic group thus becomes a function of ethnicity itself. Italians like to live with

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Italians *because* they are Italians. This may approximate the conscious conviction of residents of ethnic neighborhoods (though even that is questionable, and is certainly not uniformly true), wealthy ethnics--and some ethnics, after all, *do* become wealthy--do not generally stay in the old neighborhood, but go off into the wide White world of suburbia; the affluent seek themselves as neighbors and associates, even at the expense of ethnicity. But if class is a great leveller in one sense, it is a great particularizer in another. In a probing essay, Colin Greer has observed that, during the periods of greatest immigration to the United States, the classist foundations of American ethnic diversity were elaborated and almost immediately obscured.

> A group's position in the social order rested on its ability to meet particular conditions with appropriate skills to draw on. It is the ethnic cultural base as a setting for the continuing socialization of that readiness which keeps the ethnic structure strong--indeed, essential to the class level of behavioral conformity permitted it by the dominant culture. An ethnic group's local stability preceded its entry into the more prosperous reaches of society.
>
> Once the Old-World links are broken, the indigenuous ethnic culture becomes increasingly characterized by modifications to the American Culture and by ongoing encounter of that modified ethnic culture with the social fabric as a whole. Gradually, the ethnic groups, especially once immigration is stopped through restrictive legislation and newcomers are cut off, become aspects of an American cultural pattern--dominated by class hierarchy--not the product of a surviving projection of the Old

World....

> ....Notwithstanding the fact of ethnic diversity in America, the melting pot did melt: most groups in American society have been successfully integrated into an urban, hierarchical class structure which expresses itself in ethnic categories. The cues of felt ethnicity turn out to be the recognizable characteristics of class position in this society. (Greer, 1974:18-19)

Greer is not, as some will argue, a class-minded reductionist in this position. Ethnic differences are not merely class differences by another name. But within the structure of American society all participate in a class system which supercedes and embraces, among other things, ethnicity. Any immigrant group responds to American culture and to the social conditions of the lived-world according to the 'cultural set' and social experiences acquired in the Old World. Realistically no group has unlimited options in a situation of culture contact and will follow familiar, rational, and predictable courses of action.

The contact situation demands a reaction from all principals but in each case the immigrant group must change the most. This has consistently been the case in America, as elsewhere. Adaptation to a new culture involves more than simple re-enculturation; the host culture does not imprint its premises and operational rules on a *tabula rasa* of an immigrant's mind. Rather, the immigrant creates his own version of, in this case, American culture through what might be called a 'cultural screen' or filter. The version of America that results is different for each individual, just as each views his own culture in a peculiar, personal way. If a group of individuals shares a common

heritage to begin with, a relatively consistent theme will run through all the individual versions of America reflecting the beliefs and attitudes of the group of origin. Lest we reify the processes attending culture contact, it is important to remember that 'culture' is a non-empirical entity--it exists and is experienced only through its symbols, and is never known directly. People do not think in terms of 'culture', but in terms of the mundane, everyday issues of simple survival.

The idea that immigrants to the United States have labored so hard and endured so many hardships for the sake of preserving their ethnicity is a fantasy conceived and perpetuated largely by social science-minded elements of the upper middle class. For immigrants, the real issue has always been to make good in America, and the exigencies of daily life have been more on the order of where the money for the bread would come from than what kind of bread it would be. Quite naturally, some immigrant groups succeeded better than others in their adjustment to America, partly due to a relatively greater structural consonance of some Old World cultures with American culture, but primarily because through time the social and economic conditions of the United States have been somewhat different for each immigrant group. Immigrant groups of at least the past one hundred years have been admitted into an urban industrial working class, the exact composition of which has been fluid, but whose structural features have remained relatively constant.

One such feature has been the surplus of unskilled labor, which insured low wages and constant availibility of cheap labor. Historically, the fiercest competition for employment has been between members of immigrant groups, admitted to the U.S. to provide labor surplus [although even at the turn of

the century, more Blacks than we normally think had joined, or were attempting to join, the urban labor force (cf. Greer, 1974b:84-85)]. Large-scale conflict between ethnic groups was the order of the day, in some cities as late as the 1930's and was grounded in competition for jobs--at the lowest level between the most recently arrived and the semi-skilled laborer already established. With the virtual cessation of immigration in 1921, the increasing strength of labor and trade unions improved conditions for workers. Ethnic cleavages narrowed, owing in part to the unions' efforts to surpress strikebreaking by non-union ethnics or Blacks (cf. Aronowitz, 1974). Later, on the heels of the great depression, the post World War II boom provided more job security and opportunities for advancement into middle-class life which seemed to offer a radical break with the past. The monstrous labor problems of the earlier generation were, or seemed to be, largely resolved (certainly they *were* very much improved). It is a matter of historical fact that ethnic animosities decreased dramatically during the post-war period, not only between ethnic groups, but also between ethnics and the native born. Also, since the cessation of large-scale immigration ethnics themselves became less conspicuous with the passing of the original immigrant generation and by the cumulative effects of three more decades of 'Americanization'. Arguments to the contrary, it is demonstrably true that the seventies have seen neither the quantity nor the degree of conflict between ethnic groups that were common thirty or forty years ago. Many explanations can be offered, but surely the most crucial factor has been the replacement of Blacks for ethnics in the labor market. They have always been there, of course, but the numbers of Blacks competing for entry into the urban industries has increased dramatically since the turn of the century, and especially in the last twenty years, both absolutely and, more importantly, proportionally to the numbers of White ethnics. Ethnic

groups, now relatively well established in their labor positions, find that competition for security in the American economic system comes primarily not from ethnics, but from Blacks

URBAN INTERETHNIC GROUP CONFLICT

In the context of urban interethnic group conflict, an ethnic group will here be regarded as a group of people who share the cultural heritage of a similar adjustment to America, especially in terms of their economic and social status positions. The Kennedy family, in such a scheme, is not considered to belong to the ethnic Irish, nor are the Irish who have moved into the suburbs and are permanently settled there. By Weber's standards the *sense* of community, to say nothing of *the* community, of the ethnic group is diminished almost to the point of insignificance in those individuals who no longer exploit the real or presumed cultural affinity of their fellows along ethnic lines in their everyday relationships. Perhaps it could be argued that the financial and social success of a member of an ethnic group generally makes it difficult for him to preserve his ties with the old neighborhood since, in a real way, 'one of us has become not like us'. The successful individual had undoubtedly long since cultivated relationships outside the old neighborhood, and not along 'ethnic lines', which are prerequisite for his success. It may be argued, of course, that ethnic consciousness knows no class distinctions. After all no amount of wealth or power can completely eradicate one's Irish descent or Polish stock, but 'ethnicity' in this sense is not the ethnicity of the street, just as an American history book is not American history. And this 'gentlemen's ethnicity' rarely figures in profound conflict.

It would be well to remember Weber's suggestion

that "It is primarily the political community, no matter how artificial, that inspires the belief in a common ethnicity" (1961:306). 'Political community', in the United States especially, is difficult to define precisely, but suffice it to say that the political community normally exists and functions at multiple levels, each level's parameters being largely factors of class. That is, while a major city such as Philadelphia constitutes a political community, it is a fragmented one functionally. The city is composed of numerous neighborhoods, some of which are ethnically homogeneous. These 'ethnic neighborhoods' are almost exclusively populated by blue collar workers, and blue collar workers live for the most part, in neighborhoods considered 'ethnic'. Each neighborhood has its own leaders or, when there are no effective leaders, the neighborhood is represented by the ward leader in city politics. The real 'sense of community' in a city like Philadelphia is not expressed in terms of political units; larger than the neighborhood and the essence of the neighborhood is far from uniformily expressed in terms of its specific ethnic composition, even where that refers to only one group.

Conceptually, the real essence of blue collar communities, in Philadelphia as in other cities, is their integrity vis-a-vis groups which are, or are felt to be, of lower socio-economic class, and this has meant the Blacks more than any other group. The White ethnic neighborhood is much more likely to express its identity as a *neighborhood*, even a *White* neighborhood than it is to emphasize its ethnic composition. The neighborhood, not the ethnic group is threatened by the intrusion of Blacks. But the Blacks involved, even in local disputes, are not viewed as representing another, competing neighborhood. In Philadelphia, for example, one hears reference to South Philly Italians, Kensington Italians, South Street Jews, Northeast

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Jews, Tacony Polish, Kensington Polish, etc., etc., but of Blacks one hears only of 'Blacks', whether they be from north, south, or west sections of the city, or from Georgia, or Ohio, or wherever. The White working class neighborhoods feel threatened and are in fact threatened, by what appears to be an indifferentiated mass of Blacks who represent no single neighborhood, but are the standard bearers of all of liberal America--the Supreme Court, the Congress, the hippies, the wealthy professionals and the press, all of whom know that the White worker is what's wrong with America. The confrontation of White and Black in America's cities comes close to bringing the class dilemma into consciousness. Glazer has observed:

> Although past interethnic conflicts rarely reached the national level, current interethnic conflicts invitably involve the federal government; thus they become more public and more serious. The reasons for the greater involvement of the federal government are twofold:
>
> (1) The federal government is now more involved in local problems. Since it subsidizes so much housing the issues of residential selection are no longer left to the market, to local groups of homeowners and property-owners, and to local political structures. Inevitably housing has become a national issue, as has education....
>
> (2) A more important reason is that the federal government, owing to the history of slavery and official state deprivation and suppression for generations after emancipation, feels a responsibility toward the Black population and for its status that it did not have for the voluntary immigrant

populations. (Glazer, 1972:9)

Contemporary confrontations of White ethnics and Blacks thus bring retributions of a discriminatory society against a group (the ethnics) who have never been its most effective proponents. The federal government, along with millions of liberal sympathizers, supports Blacks in effort to achieve what is rightfully theirs--quality education, decent housing, employment security, etc.,--and frequently this means *'siding'* with Blacks against the ethnic workers. Implicit in such a notion is the idea that White ethnics have had a great deal to say about what jobs would be available to them, where they shall live, and what schools will be like, which has clearly not been the case.

In its periods of greatest expansion, American industry required huge quantities of manpower, and the immigrant forebearers of today's ethnics were admitted to the United States to fill this need. The immigrants performed well, and their children and grandchildren have performed well, and except for some rather brutal difficulties in establishing the labor unions, the hard-working ethnics have been staunch defenders of the American economic system. Ironically the ethnics who have supported the machinery of American society so well are now charged with its failing and discrimination. Ethnics are aware of the dilemma and resent it deeply. Some ethnic leaders are aware that their *real* conflict is not with the Blacks, but few have named the villain as the American economic system itself. Typically, one hears reference to the 'liberal establishment' (a self-contradictory term if taken literally) meaning those policy makers who appear to have espoused the cause of Blacks. This they may have done, but only insofar as the inevitable sacrifices for the causes are made by the worker and not by the corporation. Couched

in racial and ethnic terms, the rhetoric of urban intergroup conflict conceals the fundamental issue of class conflict. Racial and ethnic minorities in the United Stated have been the principals in the majority of intracity combats, but the cities most plagued by the 'urban blight' are inhabited chiefly by White ethnics and Black, i.e. the poor and the working class. There are within these urban ethnic populations culture differences, we can even speak of ethnic differences figuring in many 'White/Black' conflicts. But we have perhaps too readily accepted the thesis that these ethnic differences *explain* urban problems, and that their casual role in many of them is clear.

A very large percentage of the current literature dealing with the concept of 'conflict' is either original or derivative research of laboratory experimentation and/or studies of 'conflict situations' in industry. Workers in this field usually presuppose that conflict, wherever it appears, is dysfunctional. They propose that to resolve it one has to develop communication between conflicting parties, the 'common enemy' advocates are also of this theoretical bias ultimately, and nearly all implicitly adhere to the premise that for the purposes of analysis a group may be regarded as an enormous individual.

When is a conflict an interethnic conflict? When it involves two or more ethnic groups? Not necessarily, probably not even very frequently. An Italian neighborhood at odds with an Irish neighborhood over the use of the area's only playground, for example, may or may not be an interethnic conflict. If the playground supervisor teaches his Irish charges to make Italian flags on St. Patrick's Day, for example, then we may properly speak of conflict of ethnic interest. But if the playground is too small to accommodate both neighbors and an

over access ensues, then we are not justified in calling this an interethnic conflict. Perhaps a good rule of thumb would be something like this: If one or more parties involved in an intergroup conflict views the situation as one in which a group's ethnicity is either an asset or a liability, or if a disputed issue is itself an ethnic issue (e.g. vandals painting shamrocks on the Sons' of Italy Hall), then we may provisionally at least, speak of an interethnic conflict. But if two or more neighborhoods battle each other for municipal services or other scarce resources, even though these neighborhoods may be 'ethnic neighborhoods', we can speak only of 'intergroup conflicts' in which ethnics are involved.

Some conflict situations which have been identified in the literature as 'interethnic' in nature are by this scheme, incorrectly labeled. Nathan Glazer, in a paper entitled "Inter-Ethnic Conflict" offers the following example:

> ....the conflict (is) over the location of a large low-rent public housing project in Forest Hills section of the borough of Queens in New York City. Forest Hills is a middleclass Jewish area with many apartment houses. The project, which is to contain 840 units, is opposed as being too large, creating strains on transportation and schools, and introducing potential crime into the community. Because families in low-cost housing in New York City are overwhelmingly Black and Puerto Rican, the defenders of the project--city officials in the administration of Mayor John Lindsay, leaders of the Black and Puerto Rican communities, and liberal opinion generally--have accused the local residents--especially the Orthodox Jews who have recently come to Forest Hills of

being racists.

> In what sense does Forest Hills represent an interethnic conflict? The key group in the conflict is the large Jewish population of New York City, which generally has been split regarding the Mayor's policies including the location of low-income housing projects in middle income areas. Thus the main question is how Jews would divide, since they are the most numerous and influential group in the city. The other large ethnic groups are clearly united on these issues--e.g., most Italians are aganist the Mayor and most Blacks and Puerto Ricans for him. The Jewish group is split between the wealthier Manhattanites who support him and the less well-to-do living in the outer boroughs who oppose him. The national and city-wide Jewish Organizations, owing to their old alliances with civil rights organizations and their support of liberal policies, have supported the project, but the local opposition has shown remarkable power. (Glazer, 1972:6-7)

In asserting that "the main question is how Jews would divide, since they are the most numerous and influential group in the city", Glazer assumes that the involvement of ethnics in any conflict qualifies it as an interethnic one. If Glazer is right in his identification of the "main question", then Forest Hills is properly regarded as an *intra*-ethnic conflict, since both principals are Jews. But, as Glazer himself notes, the defenders of the contested housing project are "city officials in the administration of Mayor John Lindsay, leaders of the Black and Puerto Rican communities, and liberal opinion generally". A substantial proportion of the protagonists are *not* Jewish after all, nor is their involvement conceived with Jewishness. In

fact ethnicity appears not to figure at all in the Forest Hills issue, except in the limited sense that the residents of the threatened neighborhood are Jewish, and many of their liberal adversaries are Jewish. Far more important than whatever elements of Jewishness, Blackness, or Puerto Ricanness may figure in this conflict is the conflict of middle-class interests with lower-class interests, and of neighborhood residents with the ubiquitous non-resident liberals.

Intergroup conflict, and intergroup relations generally can be viewed as the interaction of disparate values, beliefs, and symbols, often accompanying competition for resources and power, but ultimately reducible to continual assertion of opposition. In such a view, conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional for society at large or for the conflicting groups themselves. As a form of social and symbolic interaction, conflict may serve positive functions within and between groups and for the larger social system of which they are a part.

The values expressed by White ethnics--the importance of family, God, patriotism, hard work, neighborhood integrity, etc.,--are not alien to America-at-large. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine more WASP-like ideals. These values then, are not themselves the basic issues of ethnic conflicts with the dominant culture. Assaults on the worker's way of life from Blacks and their allies, or those who appear to be their allies, provoke angry reactions, not only against the Blacks, but also against the White politicans believed to be responsible for the ethnic predicament. Such a reaction helped to elect and reelect Richard Nixon to the presidency. But the political conservatives turn out to be no greater champions of the working man than are the liberals. During recent administra-

tions, corporations have made great gains in power and resources, social reform programs have lost their funding, and the gulf between the working class and owning class has widened.

From one perspective, conflicts which keep the working class busy quarreling with itself serve to perpetuate the entire class hierarchy. If workers can be made to feel and *be* 'ethnic', and if urban problems can be successfully identified as 'inter-ethnic conflicts', then, perhaps the fundamental issue of *class* can continue to be obscured. But an assortment of ethnic and racial groups united as *workers*, and pressing for workers' rights in a general strike, for example would deal an incredible blow to American industry, to the economy, and most importantly to the invisibility of class. All of American society would be shaken, if not permanently disrupted by such action, although conflict among ethnics and between ethnics collectively and Blacks would be of necessity be substantially reduced from current levels. Of course, a general strike is not just around the corner for America, nor is a substantial reduction of White/Black conflict in the cities.

A pertinent question to be raised here concerns the potential value of ethnicity. What, for example, can the Ethnic Movement accomplish? If that Movement (the term is only questionably appropriate to what is happening among ethnics today) seeks to invigorate the ethnic *identities* of American workers, to stimulate greater attachment to an immigrant heritage, and to emphasize the issue of neighborhood autonomy, then its success would almost certainly help obscure the reality of class. But if ethnic identity is appealed to in an effort to broaden the association of the worker beyond his neighborhood, and if 'ethnicity' itself can help to identify a set of socio-economic statuses which

embrace numerous immigrant heritages, then perhaps the Movement can succeed, not so much in effecting a genuine florescence of particular ethnic traditions--the time for that passed with the traditions themselves--as in helping to establish an awareness in all Americans that ethnics are less ethnic than perhaps they, and surely the rest of us, have thought. It is interesting, for example, that in arguing for the White equivalent of Black studies in schools, educators, politicians, and ethnic leaders generally intend ethnic studies as fit subject matter primarily for ethnics, and not necessarily for America as a whole. While it is surely a laudable enterprise to educate children about their heritage, it is equally to their advantage that the experiences of immigrant groups and their descendents become part of the curricula to which the sons and daughters of bankers and industrialists are exposed. America *does* have a conscience, as it has finally gotten around to sensing in the case of the enslavement and oppression of Blacks. But before America moves, even when it moves almost imperceptibly slowly to correct its wrongs, Americans must know what exactly happened that was so bad. And the simple fact is that most, including the ethnics, do not know.

The full potential of an ethnic movement to help reduce urban problems cannot be realized by simply appealing to 'ethnics everywhere', or by instituting Italian heritage classes for Italian kids, Polish heritage classes for Polish kids, etc., or by encouraging the formation of national ethnic group organizations. These things might all be nice to have, of course, but the immediate issues facing ethnics do not face them as nationality groups. Rather, local neighborhoods--even 'pockets' and 'enclaves' within neighborhoods--find their immediate concerns frequently involving other neighborhoods of different ethnic composition, and often 'the Blacks'. Conflicts arise over use of a cen-

trally located facility, such as a playground or health care center, with each neighborhood claiming it as 'ours'. If an appeal to ethnicity assists each neighborhood in effectively organizing its members into genuinely representable bodies so that inter-neighborhood disputes can be argued and resolved through non-violent means, then ethnicity is the thing to appeal to. But if it does not have that effect, we must look elsewhere for a theme to carry through another decade, until a new generation gains its solvency and with it the power to find its heritage, its 'new ethnicity'.

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POLITICS OF ETHNICITY

Discusses the concept of ethnicity, reviews the Ethnic Movement in the U.S., analyzes urban ethnic conflicts, examines the relationship of class and ethnicity, and provides insight into the future of ethnicity.
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